Public Scoping Document: 2017 Motor Vehicle Use Map Update Project

Introduction

In September of 2010, the Motorized Travel Management Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) Record of Decision (ROD) was signed. Based on the ROD, a Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM) was created to inform the public about where, when and what types of motor vehicles they can legally drive on roads and trails within the Tahoe National Forest (TNF). Since that time, it has become evident that various changes are needed to the MVUM to mitigate for unintended consequences of the previous decision and to add additional existing motorized travel routes that have been identified since the 2010 FEIS ROD. These changes are largely administrative modifications to the management of existing routes; no construction or reconstruction of roads or trails is proposed. The affected routes are dispersed throughout the TNF.

The proposed changes to the MVUM include:

1) Removing fixed season of use restrictions from approximately 47 miles of paved roads; the roads would be closed by Forest Order during the wet season when snow accumulations reach 6 inches or more;

2) Removing fixed season of use restrictions from approximately 53 miles of roads and 39 miles of trails within the Burlington OHV Trail System; season of use would instead be managed by observed soil moisture conditions;

3) Adding approximately 2.2 miles of existing Forest roads to the MVUM; this would facilitate access to approximately an additional 3.2 miles of disconnected routes already shown on the MVUM;

4) Adding approximately 2 miles of existing road to the MVUM on lands recently acquired by the TNF on the Truckee Ranger District;

5) Removing from the MVUM approximately 3.3 miles of road segments dead ending on private lands;

6) Removing from the MVUM approximately 4.6 miles of isolated road segments on NFS lands which are not accessible for motor vehicle use by the public.

Purpose and Need for Action

The purpose of the project is to provide updated designation of public motor vehicle routes consistent with Forest Service Travel Management regulations at Title 36 CFR 212 Subpart B and the management of National Forest System (NFS) resources prescribed by the Tahoe National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan, 1990), as amended. Proposed revision of the MVUM will facilitate consistency with Forest Plan Goals and Desired Future Conditions. Forest Plan Recreation Goal (1) is to "Provide a broad spectrum of dispersed and developed recreation opportunities in accordance with identified needs and demands"; a Forest Plan desired condition for Recreation is that "OHV use will be provided for when such use is compatible with other resource programs and uses" (Forest Plan, p. V-5).

The project is needed to:

1) ***Improve public motor vehicle access to NFS lands*.** Since the 2010 FEIS ROD, the Forest Service has identified existing roads not currently displayed on the MVUM which could be made available for public motor vehicle use; addition of these road segments would facilitate access to several isolated and disconnected road segments which are displayed on the current MVUM.

   Fixed season of use restrictions on certain NFS roads and trails limit wet season use when the routes are dry, free of snow and do not have associated resource protection concerns. The TNF developed seasons of use for certain motorized routes on the Forest to provide motorized access to public lands while protecting resources as well as road and trail surfaces from damage. Current seasons of use were established based on predicted wet season resource conditions; routes considered for removal of fixed season of use restrictions currently have seasons extending from early to late April through December each year.

   Public motor vehicle users have voiced their desire to continue enjoying certain paved TNF roads all year when road closures are not needed to serve the intended purpose of preventing resource damage. If not for the current fixed season of use requirements, then it would be possible for public motor vehicle users to drive certain paved NFS roads safely and without causing resource damage during periods of little or no snow accumulation.

   The Burlington OHV Trail System is one of the most popular OHV trail networks on the TNF. Native-surfaced motorized routes, such as those within the Burlington OHV Trail System, are subject to seasonal closure to prevent resource damage from motorized vehicle use during wet weather conditions. Fixed seasons of use can lead to resource damage during periods of heavy precipitation when the trails or roads are open, and can limit public access opportunities during drier periods when trails or roads are closed. Precipitation-based methodologies are more responsive to user access needs and desires, but in the past have required of the Forest Service a burdensome, time consuming and impractical administrative process of creating and terminating multiple official closure orders. During the Tahoe National Forest (TNF) Motorized Travel Management Analysis process, the Off-

Highway Vehicle (OHV) community voiced strongly that they desired the TNF adopt a soil condition based process or method to determine when OHV trails should be opened or closed. However, the TNF was not prepared at the time to implement a condition based monitoring system to open and close roads or trails. The TNF now has the ability to implement condition based soil conditions monitoring, utilizing remote sensing technology, to open and close native surface roads and trails in the Burlington OHV Trail System.

2) ***More accurately display on the MVUM the available public motor vehicle access opportunities on the TNF.*** Several road segments currently displayed on the MVUM are isolated and unconnected to other NFS roads and physical motor vehicle access.

These roads appear on the MVUM as "floating" road segments. In some cases these floating road segments are due to a lack of a public right-of-way (ROW) across private lands; in other cases they are due to previous decisions to close roads which connected the floating segments to the rest of the transportation system. Removing these routes from the MVUM would lead to more accurate maps of viable public motor vehicle use opportunities.

3) ***Mitigate trespass onto private lands from National Forest System (NFS) roads.*** Several road segments currently displayed on the MVUM show public road access which dead ends within private lands and enables trespass situations.

In the 1960's through the early 1990's the TNF actively acquired a large number of road right—of-ways (ROWs) across private lands. In most cases, these road ROWs traverse the entire parcels of private lands to National Forest System (NFS) lands on the other side of the private parcels. Roads that provide legal access through private lands to NFS lands will continue to be displayed on the MVUM.

In other cases the road ROWs end on private lands and do not continue through to access NFS lands. These road ROWs were probably acquired with the intention that the TNF would eventually get road ROWs for public access in the name of the United States through the rest of the private lands and back onto the NFS lands. However, in the instances listed in Table 3 below, the TNF has not acquired road ROWs through the subject private lands and currently has no plans to do so.

As a result, the MVUM shows many roads dead ending on private land. In some cases these roads physically dead end on private lands, while in other cases the roads continue but the public road ROWs end. In both cases the roads are displayed on MVUM as dead ending. With approximately 30% of the land within the TNF boundary under private ownership, we recognized in the 2010 ROD that cooperation with the Forest's many intermixed landowners is paramount to the successful implementation of travel management. As noted to the Forest Service by some private landowners, the MVUM displaying these roads ending on

private lands may encourage trespass onto private lands beyond the end of the public road ROWs. There is no public right to camp, hike, hunt, fish or otherwise access these private parcels, except to drive the roads to the end of the ROWs, turn around and drive back on the same road. Sometimes these road ROWs end at a water source or lead to another attraction on private land.

Proposed Action

1) **Improve wet season public motor vehicle access by removing fixed season of use restrictions on certain paved Forest roads.**

Approximately 47 miles of paved Forest roads as shown in Table 1 and on the project map, Appendix A, are proposed to have season of use restrictions removed:

Table 1.

Segments of Roads Proposed for Removal of Fixed Season of Use Restrictions	Miles
NFSR 0018-Bowman Road (YRRD)	10.2
NFSR 0096-Mosquito Ridge Road (ARRD)	19.66
NFSR 0016 (ARRD)	0.05
NFSR 0016-048 (ARRD)	0.77
NFSR 0093 (YRRD)	1.9
NFSR 0007 (TKD)	14.76
Total Miles	**47.34**

* ARRD is American River Ranger District, YRRD is Yuba River Ranger District, TKD is Truckee Ranger District, and SVD is Sierraville Ranger District for all tables contained in this document.

To ensure safe motorized use of these roads, reduce the risk of stranded motorists and protect NFS resources from damage, Forest Orders will be utilized as needed to close these paved roads during periods when 6 inches or more of snow accumulate on them.

2) **Improve wet season public motor vehicle access on the Burlington OHV Trail System by removing fixed season of use restrictions and opening and closing these trails on observed soil moisture measurements.**

The TNF proposes to implement an efficient and science based soil conditions monitoring program using remote sensing technology to make opening and closure decisions for the Burlington OHV Trail System; approximately 53 miles of roads and 39 miles of trails would be affected by the proposal. The proposed method incorporates results from recent soil moisture condition remote sensing research and development projects (*Monitoring Soil Conditions in OHV Parks*, San Dimas Technology and Development Center [SDTDC], 2010, and *Wet Weather Management of OHV Trails on National Forests in California*, Poff, 2014). Both studies included

development, testing and analysis of the TNF's Burlington OHV Trail System. The remote sensing technology system designed by SDTDC would be combined with the soil strength and soil moisture relationships and threshold determinations method detailed in Poff's 2014 wet weather management study cited above.

Here is a summary of how the remote soil monitoring system would work. A remote soil monitoring station is located centrally within the Burlington OHV Trail System. It collects the following information, which is sent via cellular networks to a website:

- soil moisture (hourly)
- soil temperature (hourly)
- air temperature (hourly)
- precipitation (hourly)
- vehicle counts (hourly)
- collects pictures (every four hours during daylight)

The soil moisture data collected would be reviewed and compared against a soil moisture threshold that was developed by the Forest Service based on the scientific studies cited above. The soil moisture threshold level is determined and set at a moisture percentage where use below that level compacts the trail surface (trails would be open) and use above that level would lead to soil deformation and rutting (trails would be closed). Programmatic Forest Orders could then be created utilizing condition thresholds to open and close the trail systems to public motor vehicle use. The affected routes are displayed on the project map, Appendix A, and listed in Appendix B; any future routes added to the Burlington OHV Trail System would also be managed in this way.

3) **Add existing segments of connecting roads and trails leading to floating road and trail segments shown on the MVUM.** These "parent" roads will have the same season of use and vehicle type as the associated floating road segments they connect with on the MVUM. There are 4 of the parent road and trail segments totaling 2.86 miles which will be added to the MVUM. Addition of these routes will facilitate access to disconnected road segments already shown on the MVUM. The subject routes are displayed on Table 2 below and on the project map, Appendix A.

Table 2.

Segments of Roads Proposed for Addition to the MVUM	Mileage directly added to MVUM	Miles indirectly added, by connecting floating road segments to NFS road system	Cumulative Miles
NFSR 0005-050 – (SVD)	0.88	1.53	2.41
NFSR 0005-35-40-10 – (SVD)	0.08	0.65	0.73
NFSR 0005-020 – (SVD)	1.28	1.03	2.31
Total Miles	**2.24**	**3.21**	**5.45**

4) **Add approximately 2 miles of existing road on 1100 acres of land that the Tahoe National Forest recently acquired on the Truckee Ranger District**. When this land was privately owned, the road was not part of the National Forest transportation system and therefore was not displayed on MVUM. The road accesses the Wabena Trailhead serving the Palisade Creek Trail. The road is shown on the project map, Appendix A, with a proposed road number of 6001-050. It is located within Sections 21 and 22, T16N, R 14E.

5) **Remove from MVUM those segments of roads that are displayed as dead ending on private lands.**

This part of the proposed action only deals with road ROWs that are displayed as ending within parcels of private lands. The intent is to display these road ROWs until they exit NFS lands and then eliminate the dead end portions of the ROWs on private land from the MVUM. There are 8 known instances of this situation, totaling approximately 3.11 miles of roads, as shown in Table 3 below and the project map, Appendix A.

Table 3.

Segments of Roads and Trails Dead Ending on Private Lands	Miles
NFSR 0051 / NF Trail 16E04– (ARRD)	0.4
NFSR 0044 – (ARRD)	0.24
NFSR 9146-006 – (TKD)	0.19
NFSR 0823-001 – (YRRD)	0.16
NFSR 0098-008 – (YRRD)	0.66
NFSR 0098-010-01 – (YRRD)	0.72
NFSR 0200-32a – (YRRD)	0.58
NFSR 0424-006-12-02 – (YRRD)	0.34
Total Miles	**3.29**

Upon removal from the MVUM, the routes listed above will closed to motor vehicles except for administrative use by the Forest Service; the sole exception to this is NFSR 0051.

NFSR 0051 serves as a portion of the route for the Tevis Cup Trail (NF Trail 16E04). The proposed action for this road segment is to remove it from the MVUM and to convert the road ROW into a trail easement for the Tevis Cup Trail. The TNF anticipates managing this section of trail for non-motorized use since the underlying landowner of Section 36, T16N, R14E and Section 29, T16N, 15E has indicated willingness to grant public non-motorized use across their lands for the remainder of the Tevis Cup trail for which there is currently no public ROW; however, they are unwilling to consider granting additional motorized access across their lands for the Tevis Cup route.

There are two dead end ROW situations, not included on the list above, where the TNF is attempting to acquire ROWs on existing roads (beyond where the ROW currently ends on private land) to access the NFS land beyond the parcels. These are NFS roads 0540-20 on the Sierraville Ranger District and 852-2 on the Yuba River Ranger District. The MVUM will continue to display these two dead end roads in the hopes that, in the near future, the TNF will be able to acquire motorized ROWs and make public motor vehicle connections back to NFS lands.

6) **Remove from the MVUM isolated road segments on NFS lands which are not accessible for motor vehicle use by the public.** Nine floating and disconnected road segments are proposed for removal from the MVUM. They total approximately 4.6 miles of roadway where the parent road is not open to public motor vehicle use. Upon removal from the MVUM the routes will be closed to motor vehicle use except for administrative use by the Forest Service. These roads are shown on Table 4 below and the project map, Appendix A.

Table 4.

Road Segments on NFS lands Proposed for Removal from the MVUM	Miles
NFSR 0019-005-01-01 (ARRD)	0.80
NFSR 0088-024-04 (ARRD)	0.15
NFSR 0096-006-06 (ARRD)	0.17
NFSR 0033-058-06 (ARRD)	0.70
NFSR 0033-058-06-02 (ARRD)	0.26
NFSR 0033-045-02 (ARRD)	1.2
NFSR 0540-020-40-05-05 (SVD)	0.30
NFSR 0261-008-10 (TKD)	0.47
NFSR 0889-003-18-05-01 (TKD)	0.56
Total Miles	**4.61**